

God's Great Story

Advance in Faith 101



Lesson 5 The Gospel

So What Is It Really All About?

It’s all very well to have a great story, and the story the Christian faith presents is a great one. But is there any point to the story? What after all, is Christianity all about?

Christianity is about something that happened. Something that happened *to Jesus of Nazareth*. Something that happened *through* Jesus of Nazareth.¹

Before we explore this further let’s look at what Christianity is not:

1. Christianity is *not* about a new moral teaching.
2. Christianity is *not* about Jesus offering a wonderful moral example so that we could try to copy it.
3. Christianity is *not* about Jesus offering, demonstrating or even accomplishing a new route by which people can ‘go to heaven when they die’.
4. Christianity is *not* about giving the world fresh teaching about God himself.

So what then is Christianity?

Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfilment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this—the finding, the saving, the giving of new life—in Jesus. He has done it. With Jesus, God’s rescue operation has been put into effect once for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never again be shut. It is the door to the prison where we have been kept chained up. **We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God’s rescue for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we now have access.** In particular, we are all invited—summoned, actually—to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work at bringing it to birth on earth as in heaven. In listening to Jesus, we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along.²

A Summary:

Humanity lived in a world under the authority of God. He was the king and the universe was his kingdom. All created things were in some sense His subjects. Humanity was his very special subject, made in His image, in His likeness and given the created world to have authority over, as God had authority over them. They were given the freedom to choose to whom they would be subject – God or themselves?

They chose to be subject to themselves! This action is called sin.

¹ Tom Wright, *Simply Christian* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 78.

² Tom Wright, *Simply Christian* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 79.

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In choosing to be their own lord, Adam and Eve separated themselves, and all of creation, and all future generations, from God. This separation brought death to humanity.

God loved what He had created, especially humans, so much that He began a plan to rescue humanity and creation from the effects of sin and death.

This plan began with the choosing of a few special people to work with God and then the choosing of a special nation, Israel, to work with God to bring into the world God in human form. At the end of the story of Israel, Jesus came and lived as a man, died as a criminal and was resurrected from death.

All authority, all kingship, was given to Jesus after his resurrection, after his defeat of death.

His resurrection established a kingdom where death and sin are no longer present, where we are offered eternal life, and where creation is fully restored to its original created state. This kingdom is now awaiting the return of the king, the Second Coming, when God’s space and human’s space will again be re-united, and truth and justice will prevail.

The Comprehensive Scope of Salvation in the New Testament

The table below shows specific statements made in various New Testament texts that describe the final, eschatological (end of history) completion of salvation— what is expected to happen when God’s redemptive purposes come to fruition.

This information comes, in part, from Richard J. Middleton’s book *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. Baker Publishing Group, 2014

Look up each passage in your group and read the passage. If you have different translations, see how they might differ. Note what each of the passage says about the completion of the story of salvation.

Ask and answer the following two questions about each of the passages;

- First, how is salvation, or the saving activity of God, described?
- And second, what is the object or recipient of God’s saving activity? That is, who or what gets saved?

Passage	How is Salvation Described?	Who or what is saved?
Acts 3:19-21		
Eph. 1: 9– 10		
Col. 1: 19– 20		
Romans 8:19-23		
2 Peter 3: 10–13		

Group Questions:

- Do these views of what salvation is all about differ from what you have heard?
- How do you think a belief in all things being saved might help in everyday life?
- How would the world work if there were no selfishness?